

## Cuba opens rice paddies to Vietnam: a breath of fresh air for socialist agriculture



Rice cultivation in Cuba (source: [Trabajadores/KI-scaled](#))

In Cuba's western province of Pinar del Rio, an agricultural experiment is currently taking place that is unprecedented on the Caribbean island: for the first time since 1959, the state is allowing a foreign company to use land for independent cultivation.

### Unprecedented project

As the party newspaper *Granma* [reports](#), a Vietnamese company has been granted land belonging to state-owned agricultural enterprises in the Los Palacios area to grow rice for domestic consumption. This year, the first 1,000 hectares are to be cultivated, and later the area is to be expanded to 5,000 hectares. Initially, the license is valid for three years.

Cuba has been working with its longtime ally Vietnam on rice cultivation for some time. However, the projects have repeatedly suffered setbacks due to a lack of resource allocation, bureaucracy, and mismanagement. By leasing entire areas to a foreign company, the Ministry of Agriculture hopes to avoid these problems in the future and to sustainably boost rice production. "The transfer of land is unprecedented in our country," Jorge Félix Chamizo, deputy director of the Cuban company, told *Granma*.

One of the measures is that the Vietnamese company can decide autonomously on the recruitment of the required Cuban workers. In addition, the company will bring its own specialists into the country and provide fertilizers, herbicides, and other resources. These were recently [exempted from import duties](#). The Cuban company will pay for the machinery in return.

Modern Vietnamese hybrid rice varieties will be cultivated on the land. This should reduce the amount of seed required from 150 to 30 kilograms per hectare. In the first year, yields of seven tons per hectare are expected, and from the second year onwards, an increase to eight tons is anticipated. This would exceed many times over the planned yields of the Cuban company on its own land. Due to the difficult economic situation in the country, the expected yield there is only 1.7 tons per hectare.

### **Adaptation to Cuban conditions**

In order to align mechanisms and working methods, 16 hectares of experimental fields have been set up, where both sides are testing what is to be implemented on a large scale later. The differences in rice production between the two countries are considerable.

While many people in Vietnam cultivate small plots, in Cuba it is a matter of large areas where only a few workers are employed and most of the work depends on airplanes and machines. The first sowings therefore served to evaluate technologies, recalculate costs and adapt the original ideas to the Cuban reality.

“We are adapting our techniques to the conditions in Cuba,” explains Duong Ho Van, the leading specialist of the Vietnamese company, who is optimistic that the transfer will be a success. To this end, repairs have already been carried out on water channels and other areas.

If successful, the project could become a model for other areas of Cuban agriculture. Although theoretically open to foreign investment for several years, no such projects have been implemented so far – until now. Chamizo hopes that the project will be emulated and will attract further investment in the Cuban agricultural sector.

Cuba's chronically undercapitalized agriculture has been particularly hard hit by the economic crisis. The import quota for food has increased in recent years from 60-70 to currently over 80 percent. Cuba's rice demand is around 800,000 tons. Production has declined in recent years from 673,000 tons in 2013 to 144,000 tons in 2022. Vietnam was the [fifth largest rice producer in the world](#) in 2024, with a harvest of 26.3 million tons. ([Cubaheute](#))